

# PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA 2025



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# THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA ON THE EVE OF THE 2025 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

## 1. THE GEOSTRATEGIC STAKES OF THE 2025 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova, scheduled for September 28, 2025, go beyond the scope of a routine electoral exercise. They represent a confrontation between two opposing projects: one oriented toward European integration and the consolidation of democratic institutions, and the other aligned with the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation. In a tense international context, marked by U.S.–Russia negotiations over the war in Ukraine, the elections acquire a distinct strategic significance. Although the Republic of Moldova is not formally on the agenda of these negotiations, the outcome of the vote could influence the regional security architecture.

Over the past three years, the Republic of Moldova has made significant progress on its path toward European integration. The granting of EU candidate status in June 2022,<sup>1</sup> followed by the official opening of accession negotiations in June 2024,<sup>2</sup> has strengthened Chișinău's pro-Western aspirations. To support this process, the European Union approved in 2025 an Economic Growth Plan for the Republic of Moldova worth €1.9 billion for the 2025–2027 period.<sup>3</sup> A recent statement by the President of the European Council, António Costa, on September 3, 2025, indicated that technical negotiations on the accession chapters could be officially launched after the parliamentary elections of September 28, provided that the outcome reaffirms the Republic of Moldova's commitment to its European course.<sup>4</sup>

In parallel, the Russian Federation has intensified its hostile rhetoric toward Moldova, employing narratives similar to those used against Ukraine, with the aim of undermining the legitimacy of Chișinău's strategic decisions and projecting a distorted image of Moldova's domestic reality on the international stage. In 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that the Republic of Moldova risked 'sharing Ukraine's fate,' claiming that the West had installed a president favorable to NATO accession and unification with Romania.<sup>5</sup> A joint report issued by the foreign ministries of Russia and Belarus in 2025 accused Chișinău of adopting the 'practices of the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv.' The document asserted that, since

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<sup>1</sup> Mihaela Conovali, "The Republic of Moldova received the status of candidate country for EU accession," *Newsmaker.md*, June 23, 2022,

<https://newsmaker.md/ro/republica-moldova-a-primit-statutul-de-tara-candidat-pentru-aderarea-la-ue>

<sup>2</sup> "Maia Sandu signed the decree on the start of EU accession negotiations," *Europa Liberă Moldova*, June 21, 2024,

<https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/maia-sandu-a-semnat-decretul-privind-inceperea-negocierilor-de-aderare-la-ue/33003568.html>

<sup>3</sup> Iurie Rotari, "1.9 Billion Euro Aid for Moldova Approved by the European Parliament," *Radio Europa Liberă Moldova*, published May 1, 2025,

<https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/ajutorul-de-1-9-miliarde-de-euro-pentru-moldova-aprobat-de-parlamentul-european/33343838.html>

<sup>4</sup> Alina Cotoros, "When will the EU open the first cluster of accession negotiations with Chisinau? Announcement by the President of the European Council," *Adevărul.ro*, September 4, 2025, [https://adevarul.ro/stiri-externe/republica-moldova/cand-ue-va-deschide-primul-cluster-de-negocieri-de-2469682.html#google\\_vignette](https://adevarul.ro/stiri-externe/republica-moldova/cand-ue-va-deschide-primul-cluster-de-negocieri-de-2469682.html#google_vignette)

<sup>5</sup> Denis Dermenji, "Sergei Lavrov threatens: 'R. Moldova, the next Ukraine'," *Europa Liberă Moldova*, February 2, 2023,

<https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/lavrov-acuz%C4%83-r-moldova---urm%C4%83toarea-ucrain%C4%83-/32252382.html>

February 2022, the situation of Russian citizens and Russian-speaking communities had significantly deteriorated, citing alleged policies of discrimination against the Russophone community, marginalization of the Russian language, and the establishment of an authoritarian-type regime. At the same time, European integration was portrayed as being 'contrary to the national interests' of citizens, while the West was accused of turning the Republic of Moldova into a 'Russophobic periphery' of the European Union.<sup>6</sup>

A victory of pro-Russian parties in the September parliamentary elections risks diminishing Western support for the Republic of Moldova and validating Russia's propaganda narratives. In such a scenario, Moldova could find itself on the U.S.–Russia negotiation agenda, at Moscow's insistence, to be shifted into Russia's sphere of influence—especially since Chișinău's relationship with the Trump administration appears considerably more limited compared to its previously sustained dialogue with the Biden administration, which publicly condemned Moscow's interference in Moldova's internal affairs and allocated significant resources, through USAID, for key projects in development, energy security, and democratic consolidation.<sup>7</sup>

Domestically, the presidential elections and the referendum on European integration in October 2024 revealed major weaknesses in the Republic of Moldova's electoral process. The referendum passed by a very narrow margin of just 50.46%, largely due to the diaspora, which accounted for 16% of the electorate and decisively tipped the balance.<sup>8</sup> The result was all the more surprising given that polls had consistently indicated over 60% domestic support for European integration.<sup>9</sup> Chișinău authorities reported the involvement of Russian intelligence services in an attempt to influence the outcome, carried out along two main lines: the bribery of socially vulnerable voters and a massive disinformation campaign.<sup>10</sup>

The Republic of Moldova was divided into 119 territorial cells, each composed of approximately 1,500 activists tasked with mobilizing 5–10 voters in exchange for cash payments. The recruited individuals were asked to photograph their passports in order to open accounts at Promsvyazbank (PSB) — a strategic Russian bank serving as the main financial channel for the Russian Federation's military–industrial complex, headed by Pyotr Fradkov, the son of former Prime Minister and ex-director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), Mikhail Fradkov. According to Moldovan authorities, at least \$39 million was allocated for voter bribery in September and October 2024, influencing the votes of around 150,000 people — the equivalent of 10% of total voter turnout. The operation was coordinated by the network

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "On the human rights situation in certain countries," June 24, 2025, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/doklady/2028846/](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/doklady/2028846/)

<sup>7</sup> Ecaterina Arvintii, "Joe Biden on Maia Sandu's Re-election: Russia Has Failed," *Moldova1.md*, October 20, 2024, <https://moldova1.md/p/38346/joe-biden-despre-realegerea-maiei-sandu--rusia-a-esuat->

<sup>8</sup> "LIVE TEXT Referendum 2024. Plebiscite Results in Districts," *Ziarul de Gardă*, October 20, 2024, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/politic/live-text-referendum-2024-rezultatele-plebiscitului-in-raioane/>

<sup>9</sup> WatchDog.MD Community, October 2024 Survey, October 2024, <https://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Sondaj-Octombrie-2024.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova, "Evaluation of the Russian Federation's involvement in the electoral processes in the Republic of Moldova in 2024-2025", March 5, 2024, <https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Scenarii%20de%20influen%C8%9B%C4%83%202024-2025.pdf>.



controlled by oligarch Ilan Shor, exiled in Moscow, from where he continues to orchestrate subversive actions against pro-European authorities.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 1. Police raids on members of the Shor Group in November 2024<sup>12</sup>

For the Russian Federation, the September parliamentary elections represent one of the last opportunities to bring the Republic of Moldova back into its sphere of influence through political means. In a parliamentary system where presidential prerogatives are limited, Moscow could attempt to replicate in Moldova the scenario applied in Georgia—where pro-Western President Salome Zourabichvili was effectively isolated by a hostile parliamentary majority that imposed a controversial legislative agenda and undermined relations with Western partners.

Unlike the Georgian case, potential Russian political control over the Republic of Moldova would transform the country into an active instrument of pressure against Ukraine, with direct consequences for the regional security balance, to Kyiv's detriment. The assassination on July 10, 2025—when Colonel Ivan Voronich of Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) was shot by two FSB agents who reportedly entered Ukrainian territory via Moldova—illustrates clearly how Moldovan territory can be used in clandestine operations against Ukraine.<sup>13</sup>

A pro-Russian government in Chișinău could also exploit sensitive issues for Ukraine, such as the status of national minorities or even border questions. A relevant example is the statement of former President Igor Dodon, leader of the Socialist Party, who in February 2025 declared that 'part of Ukraine's lands belong to the Republic of Moldova' and demanded the suspension of aid transit to Kyiv until the 'rights of Moldovans' in Ukrainian regions are recognized.<sup>14</sup> Such declarations serve the geopolitical objectives of the Russian Federation, which seeks to weaken Ukraine's unity and resilience through pressure exerted by its neighbors.

<sup>11</sup> Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova, "Electoral Fraud Found in the Presidential Elections and the Republican Referendum: External Meddling in the Electoral Processes in the Republic of Moldova," November 1, 2024, [https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Raport\\_SIS\\_Public\\_Interferenta\\_in\\_procesul\\_electoral.pdf](https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Raport_SIS_Public_Interferenta_in_procesul_electoral.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> "Law Enforcement Officers Conducted Over 60 Searches in Voter Corruption Case. Four People Have Been Detained," Radio Chișinău, published November 1, 2024, <https://radiochisinau.md/video-oamenii-legii-au-efectuat-pest-60-de-perchezitii-in-dosarul-coruperii-alegatorilor-patru-persoane-au-fost-retinute---203039.html>.

<sup>13</sup> "Kiev Assassination: Two FSB Agents Entered Ukraine via Moldova," *Știri.md*, July 14, 2025., <https://stiri.md/article/international/asasinatul-de-la-kiiev-doi-agenti-fsb-au-patruns-in-ucraina-prin-moldova>

<sup>14</sup> "Igor Dodon Claims 'Some of Ukraine's Lands Belong to Moldova.' Dodon Urges Maia Sandu to Set Conditions for Ukrainians," Ziarul de Gardă, May 20, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/igor-dodon-afirma-ca-o-parte-din-pamanturile-ucrainei-sunt-ale-r-moldova-dodon-cere-maiei-sandu-sa-puna-conditii-ucrainenilor/>.

## 2. THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THREE YEARS AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

On August 27, 2025, the Republic of Moldova marked 34 years since the proclamation of its independence from the Soviet Union. However, the real process of consolidating national independence only gained significant momentum after the outbreak of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, when the Republic of Moldova firmly positioned itself on Kyiv's side. This clear stance proved essential for maintaining a logistical and humanitarian corridor between Ukraine and the West. In the first weeks of the conflict, approximately 80% of Ukrainian refugees entering the Republic of Moldova were hosted in Moldovan households through a remarkable voluntary effort. Since the beginning of the invasion, over one million refugees have transited Moldovan territory, placing the Republic of Moldova first in Europe in terms of refugees received per capita.<sup>15</sup>

A key moment in strengthening the resilience of the Republic of Moldova in the current geopolitical context was the complete elimination of its dependence on Russian gas—used by Moscow since the 1990s as a political pressure tool against Chișinău. Since December 2022, Moldovan authorities have fully abandoned gas imports from the Russian Federation, following Gazprom's unilateral reductions of deliveries in the autumns of 2021 and 2022, in an attempt to generate social tensions and undermine the pro-European government.<sup>16</sup> At present, Moldova's natural gas needs are met entirely through purchases on the European market, supplied largely via the Iași–Chișinău pipeline—operational since 2021, built by Romania with its own and EU funds.

In addition to the natural gas crisis, the Republic of Moldova has also faced energy pressures exerted by the Russian Federation through the Transnistrian region. In January 2025, with the expiration of the Russian gas transit contract through Ukraine, the Cuciurgan thermal power plant—controlled by the Tiraspol administration—halted electricity deliveries, which had previously covered between 80 and 90% of consumption in the regions under the authority of the constitutional government.<sup>17</sup> The emergency synchronization, carried out in March 2022, of Moldova's and Ukraine's power grids with the European ENTSO-E system provided Chișinău with direct access to the European energy market.<sup>18</sup> Romania plays a central role in supporting Moldova's energy stability, supplying the majority of imported electricity, often at subsidized prices.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, financial support from the European Union—amounting

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<sup>15</sup> Andreea Popescu, "R. Moldova received the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita in Europe," *Stiripesurse.md*, June 10, 2024, <https://stiripesurse.md/r-moldova-a-primit-cel-mai-mare-numar-de-refugiati-ucraineni-pe-cap-de-locuitor-din-europa/>.

<sup>16</sup> Mihaela Conovali, "Gazprom Reduces Gas Deliveries for December—by 56.5%. Marian: The Government Was Prepared for This Scenario," *Newsmaker.md*, November 22, 2022, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/gazprom-reduce-livrarile-de-gaz-pentru-luna-decembrie-cu-56-5-marian-guvernul-s-a-pregatit-pentru-acest-scenariu>.

<sup>17</sup> Olga Scripnic, "The Cuciurgan power plant will provide over 90% of the electricity needed for the right bank of the Dniester in June," *Agora.md*, May 28, 2024, <https://agora.md/2024/05/28/centrala-de-la-cuciurgan-va-asigura-pest-90percent-din-energie-electrica-necesara-malului-drept-al-nistrului-in-luna-iunie>.

<sup>18</sup> "Romania Will Provide Energy Assistance to Moldova," *Deutsche Welle*, October 13, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/ro/din-pu%C8%9Binul-pe-care-%C3%AEI-are-rom%C3%A2nia-va-ajuta-energetic-republica-moldova/a-63431075>

<sup>19</sup> "EU Offers 250 Million Euros for the Right Bank of the Dniester and 60 Million for the Left Bank," Jurnal TV, n.d., <https://www.jurnaltv.md/news/c7aa0135f09d383e/ue-ofera-250-de-milioane-de-euro-pentru-malul-drept-al-nistrului-si-60-de-milioane-pentru-malul-stang.html>

to approximately €250 million—has helped mitigate the impact of price volatility on the population. In parallel, renewable energy production capacities—solar and wind—have increased eightfold over the past four years, reaching 16.7% of the energy mix in 2024, with projections to reach 27% in 2025.<sup>20</sup>



Evolution of Installed Renewable Energy Capacities, 2018 – July 2025 (MW)

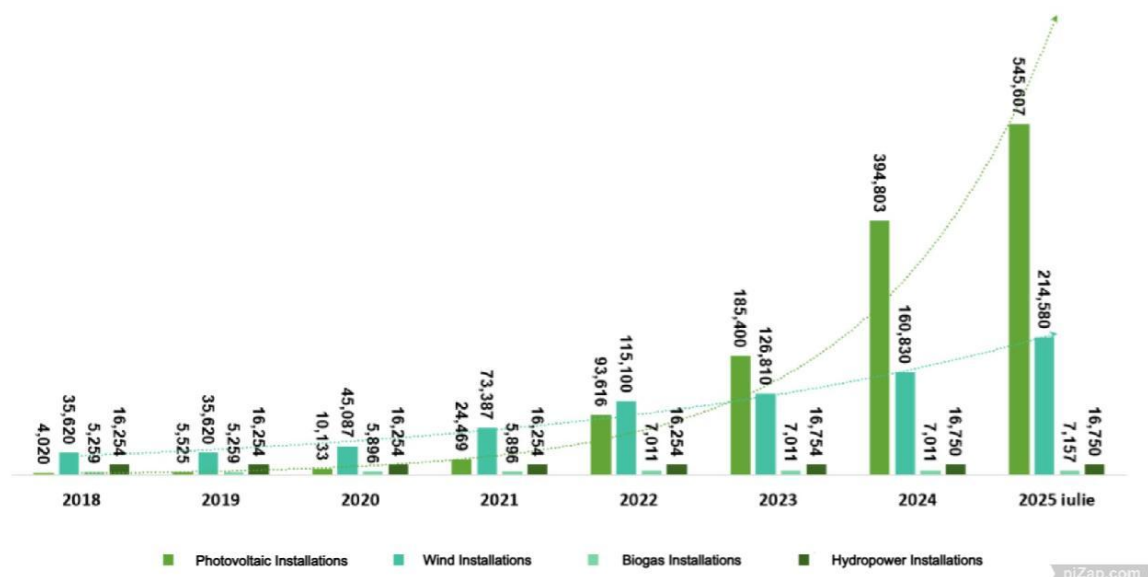


Fig. 2. Evolution of Installed Renewable Energy Capacities, 2018 – July 2025 (MW)<sup>21</sup>

In 2023, the Republic of Moldova adopted a new National Security Strategy which, for the first time, explicitly identifies the Russian Federation as a major threat to state security.<sup>22</sup> The document sets the goal of reaching a defense budget of 1% of GDP by 2030, reflecting a paradigm shift compared to previous governments that emphasized investments in defense were unnecessary due to the country's neutrality status. France has emerged as a strategic defense partner, signing an agreement in 2024 to support the development of Moldova's military capabilities, particularly in the area of airspace protection. The need for an effective air detection and defense system became evident in the context of the war in Ukraine, following multiple incidents in which Russian drones and missiles violated Moldovan airspace. By 2026, the Republic of Moldova is expected to have a fully operational air defense system,

<sup>20</sup> "Republic of Moldova Reaches a New Record in Renewable Energy Production," *Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Moldova*, May 21, 2025, <https://energie.gov.md/ro/content/republica-moldova-atinge-un-nou-record-productia-de-energie-regenerabila>.

<sup>21</sup> National Center for Sustainable Energy (CNED), "Installed Capacity," July 2025, <https://cned.gov.md/ro/content/capacitati-instalate>.

<sup>22</sup> Cristian Sava, "Russia is the main threat to the Republic of Moldova and the entire region. National Defense Strategy for the years 2024-2034, approved by the Government in Chișinău," *TVR Moldova*, July 17, 2024, <https://tvrmdova.md/article/c14a12499c836b83/rusia-este-principala-amenintare-in-adresa-republicii-moldova-si-a-intregii-regiuni-strategia-apararii-nationale-pentru-anii-2024-2034-aprobata-de-guvernul-de-la-chisinau>.

financed through a €20 million European grant,<sup>23</sup> while the Parliament in Chișinău has already adopted legislation regulating national airspace security.<sup>24</sup>



*Fig. 3. Moldova summons Russian Ambassador after drones fall on its soil<sup>25</sup>*

The transformations of recent years have entailed a high social cost for the population and, implicitly, a political cost for the pro-European government. The shift to purchasing natural gas from the European market occurred in a context of historically high prices, while electricity tariffs also rose significantly. The war in Ukraine and supply chain disruptions contributed to a record inflation rate of 34% in 2022, with strong effects on living standards. These price increases generated discontent among the population, which was heavily exploited and amplified by pro-Russian opposition forces. According to a 2025 survey, 39% of respondents cited prices as the country's main problem, while 26% mentioned insufficient incomes.<sup>26</sup> Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that in 2024, 25.6% of the population was affected

<sup>23</sup> "The Republic of Moldova will have a complete anti-aircraft defense system in 2026. Maia Sandu: 'We are implementing this together with the EU.'" *Veridica*, May 13, 2025. <https://www.veridica.md/stiri/r-moldova-va-avea-un-sistem-complet-de-aparare-antiaeriana-in-2026-maia-sandu-implementam-acest-lucru-impuna-cu-ue>.

<sup>24</sup> "Moldova will have a complete Air Defense System by 2026. Maia Sandu: 'We are achieving this with EU Support,'" *RFI*, May 13, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/ro/republica-moldova/20250513-r-moldova-va-avea-un-sistem-complet-de-ap%C4%83rare-antiaerian%C4%83-%C3%AE-n-2026-maia-sandu-realiz%C4%83m-acest-lucru-fiind-sus%C8%9Binu%C8%9Bi-de-ue>.

<sup>25</sup> "Fragments of drones fallen in the South of the country were presented to the Agreed-Upon Ambassador of Russia. The Russian Cultural Center will cease its activity," *Ziarul de Gardă*, February 13, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/politic/video-ambasadorului-agreat-al-rusiei-i-s-au-pus-in-fata-fragmentele-dronelor-cazute-in-sutul-tarii-centrul-cultural-rus-isi-va-sista-activitatea/>.

<sup>26</sup> Maria-Emilia Hîncu, "Record optimism in Moldova: More and more people believe we are heading in the right direction. Top problems felt by citizens," *TV8.md*, June 13, 2025, <https://tv8.md/2025/06/13/optimism-record-in-moldova-tot-mai-multi-cred-ca-mergem-in-directia-buna-top-probleme-resimtite-de-cetateni/283368>.



by multidimensional poverty (limited access to essential services), while 33.6% lived below the absolute poverty line, set at 3,493.3 lei (approximately €180) per month. In rural areas, the situation is even more severe: 42.9% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line, and 37.6% faces multidimensional poverty.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, the Republic of Moldova has become the target of an information war orchestrated by the Russian Federation, significantly intensified after the outbreak of the invasion of Ukraine. A recent journalistic investigation revealed the existence of an extensive network of activists paid from Moscow to manipulate public opinion. These activists receive specialized training in digital propaganda techniques: they are taught how to craft and distribute targeted messages on platforms such as TikTok and Telegram, how to trick algorithms to maximize visibility, and how to conceal their identity using VPNs and fake accounts. The network operates daily in the online space, promoting anti-European messages and functioning as a 'humanized bot farm'—difficult to detect as part of a coordinated campaign. According to the investigation, the structure was also used to promote Călin Georgescu, former Romanian presidential candidate, known for his sovereigntist and pro-Russian positions.<sup>28</sup>

In Moldova's digital space, thousands of fake accounts and pages are active, both in Romanian and Russian, distributing sponsored content and generating comments with the help of artificial intelligence.<sup>29</sup> Manipulation campaigns exploit fear, economic insecurity, and social frustrations. These accounts interact with one another to artificially amplify messages. The main propaganda narratives include:

- 'The government is preparing to rig the elections';
- 'PAS and Maia Sandu are the enemies of the people—they have captured and impoverished the country';
- 'Moldova is under dictatorship and foreign control exercised by the European Union';
- 'NATO will use Moldova as a theater of war against Russia';
- 'PAS wants to depopulate the country to make room for EU immigrants, while Moldovans are cheap labor for the West.'

These messages are systematically disseminated with the aim of destabilizing society, undermining trust in the government, and fostering a generalized climate of discontent intended to influence the outcome of the parliamentary elections.

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<sup>27</sup> "Multidimensional Poverty in the Republic of Moldova in 2024," *National Bureau of Statistics*, May 29, 2025, [https://statistica.gov.md/ro/saracia-multidimensionala-in-republica-moldova-in-anul-2024-10102\\_61803.html](https://statistica.gov.md/ro/saracia-multidimensionala-in-republica-moldova-in-anul-2024-10102_61803.html).

<sup>28</sup> Natalia Zaharescu, "The Kremlin's Digital Army. Undercover Investigation. 'It's Paid! Let Me Tell You, It's Paid Directly from Moscow,'" *Ziarul de Gardă*, September 3, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/video-armata-digitala-a-kremlinului-investigatie-sub-acoperire-se-plateste-hai-sa-va-spun-se-plateste-direct-de-la-moscova/>.

<sup>29</sup> Mădălina Voinea and Sorin Ioniță, "Analysis of Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior in Moldova: 23 Days Before the Elections," *Fact-Hub.eu*, September 5, 2025, <https://fact-hub.eu/ro/2025/09/05/analiza-comportamentului-inautentic-coordonat-in-moldova-23-de-zile-inainte-de-alegeri/>.

### 3. THE MAIN POLITICAL FORCES IN THE RACE FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

#### The Pro-European Camp

The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), supported by President Maia Sandu, remains the principal pro-European political force in the Republic of Moldova. However, after four years of governance marked by successive crises, PAS is facing an erosion of electoral support. Judicial reform—one of the party's central promises during the 2021 electoral campaign—has since become the most contested project of the current government. The law on the external evaluation of judges and prosecutors, which entered into force in August 2023, has sparked harsh criticism from the opposition and parts of the judiciary. In nearly three years, over 100 magistrates have left the system, either after failing evaluations or to avoid the vetting procedure. In August 2025 alone, 17 prosecutors resigned immediately after being required to submit asset declarations.<sup>30</sup> These chain resignations, combined with discrediting campaigns, have undermined the functioning of the judicial system and generated significant delays in key processes: the formation of the Superior Council of Prosecutors took 13 months,<sup>31</sup> while that of the Superior Council of Magistracy took 21 months.<sup>32</sup> The estimated deadline for completing the reform remains the end of 2025, though risks of delay persist. Moreover, public trust in the reform process has been shaken by several incidents, including the flight of MPs Alexandr Nesterovschi who took refuge in the Transnistrian region after being sentenced to 12 years in prison,<sup>33</sup> and Marina Tauber, who fled to the Russian Federation.<sup>34</sup> Both parliamentarians are associated with the influence network coordinated by fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor, and these episodes have raised questions about the effectiveness of the authorities and the overall success of judicial reform.

In 2025, the electoral campaign of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) is centered on defending the Republic of Moldova's European path against oligarchic and pro-Russian influences. The party's central objective is accession to the European Union by 2028. PAS's major challenge is not only to secure an electoral victory, but above all to form a parliamentary majority capable of supporting a reformist program, essential for advancing European integration. In the absence of a clear majority, PAS lacks a predictable political partner. The pro-European opposition does not pose a formidable competitor to PAS, as it remains fragmented into small parties unable to establish themselves as viable alternatives for the electorate.

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<sup>30</sup> "Wave of resignations among prosecutors: 17 specialists have left their posts," *Stirionline.md*, July 3, 2025, <https://stirionline.md/val-de-demisii-in-randul-procurorilor-17-specialisti-au-plecat-din-functii/>.

<sup>31</sup> "The Superior Council of Prosecutors has a new composition," *Radio Chişinău*, September 18, 2025, <https://radiochisinau.md/consiliul-superior-al-procurorilor-are-o-noua-componenta---190467.html>.

<sup>32</sup> "Only 5 out of 28 Passed the Test. The Pre-Vetting Commission Has Finalized the Evaluation of Candidates for Positions in the SCM from Among Judges," *Bizlaw.md*, February 7, 2023, <https://bizlaw.md/public/doar-5-din-28-au-trecut-testul-comisia-pre-vetting-a-finalizat-evaluarea-candidatilor-la-functii-in-csm-din-randul-judecatorilor>.

<sup>33</sup> "How the turncoat deputy Alexandr Nesterovschi fled to the Transnistrian region before his sentence. SIS presents the chronology of events: 'Russia helped him.'" *Ziarul de Gardă*, March 31, 2025. <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/video-cum-a-fugit-deputatul-transfug-alexandr-nesterovschi-in-regiunea-transnistreana-inainte-de-a-si-afla-sentinta-sis-prezinta-cronologia-evenimentelor-rusia-l-a-ajutat/>.

<sup>34</sup> Măriuța Nistor, "Tauber at the courthouse only on posters. 'She is in the Russian Federation, that's her place.'" *Ziarul de Gardă*, August 4, 2025. <https://www.zdg.md/video/video-tauber-la-judecatorie-doar-pe-pancarte-e-in-federatia-rusa-acolo-i-locul-ei/>.

## The Pro-Russian Camp and the Populists

Unlike the 2024 presidential elections, when pro-Russian forces relied on fragmenting the electorate by promoting as many candidates as possible, for the 2025 parliamentary elections they have adopted a different strategy, focused on forming electoral blocs. The objective is clear: to avoid the risk that affiliated parties fail to pass the 5% electoral threshold—a scenario that would benefit PAS through the vote redistribution mechanism.

The 'Patriotic' Bloc, created in July 2025, is an explicitly pro-Russian coalition composed of several parties and political leaders with close ties to Moscow. The bloc includes the following formations:

1. The Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), led by former president Igor Dodon, investigated in multiple criminal cases, including for high treason.<sup>35</sup>
2. The Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), led by Vladimir Voronin, head of state between 2001 and 2009, known for advocating Moldova's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union.
3. The Heart of Moldova Party, led by Irina Vlah, former Bashkan (governor) of Gagauzia. On August 28, 2025, Vlah was included on a Canadian sanctions list for 'Russian interference activities' in the context of Moldova's parliamentary elections.<sup>36</sup>
4. The Future of Moldova Party, led by Vasile Tarlev, former prime minister during the Communist government. Tarlev is currently perceived as being close to Ilan Shor's network.<sup>37</sup>

The bloc openly pledges to revive the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, and its leaders—Igor Dodon, Irina Vlah, and Vasile Tarlev—frequently travel to Moscow. Recently, they held a meeting with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, focused on revitalizing economic and energy relations.<sup>38</sup> The bloc's public discourse employs alarmist rhetoric, claiming that another victory by pro-European forces would turn Moldova into a "deserted territory handed over to foreign interests." In its electoral program, the formation promises to sign a gas supply contract with Russia at a preferential price for at least five years and to lower the retirement age to 57. In 2024, some members of the bloc introduced draft

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<sup>35</sup> Stela Untila, "Searches at Igor Dodon's home. He is targeted in a criminal case for corruption, illegal financing, treason, and illicit enrichment." *NewsMaker*, May 24, 2022. <https://newsmaker.md/ro/pechezitii-acasa-la-igor-dodon-este-vizat-intr-un-dosar-penal-pentru-corupere-finantare-ilegala-tradare-de-patrie-si-imbogatire-ilicita>.

<sup>36</sup> Nichita Covalenco, "Canada imposed sanctions on 16 people, including Irina Vlah, Evghenia Gutul, and Alexei Lungu," *NewsMaker*, August 28, 2025. <https://newsmaker.md/ro/canada-a-impus-sanctiuni-pentru-16-persoane-inclusiv-irina-vlah-evghenia-gutul-si-alexei-lungu>.

<sup>37</sup> Iurie Rotari, "The CEC notes that Tarlev's 'Future of Moldova' party and Shor's 'Renaissance' party are in an unofficial alliance," *Europa Liberă Moldova*, October 2, 2024, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/cec-constata-ca-partidele-viitorul-moldovei-al-lui-tarlev-si-renastere-al-lui-sor-sunt-intr-o-alianta-neoficiala/33143297.html>

<sup>38</sup> "Igor Dodon, Irina Vlah, and Vasile Tarlev Visited Moscow Again: The Three Want to 'Relaunch Economic and Energy Relations' with Russia," *Ziarul de Gardă*, July 10, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/igor-dodon-irina-vlah-si-vasile-tarlev-au-fost-din-nou-la-moscova-cei-trei-isi-doresc-relansarea-relatiilor-economice-si-energetice-cu-rusia/>

laws aimed at restricting the voting rights of the diaspora and at establishing a ‘foreign agents’ law in the Republic of Moldova.<sup>39</sup>



*Fig. 4. Meeting between Alexander Novak and party leaders: Igor Dodon, Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova; Irina Vlah, Heart of Moldova; and Vasile Tarlev, Future of Moldova<sup>40</sup>*

Aware of the loss of popular support for the old pro-Russian political elite, the Russian Federation has adapted its tactics in the Republic of Moldova. It continues to back leaders with an explicitly pro-Russian discourse, but is increasingly extending its support to politicians who present themselves as moderates or even as seemingly pro-European. This strategy aims to broaden the electoral base of Kremlin-affiliated forces by attracting votes from different segments of society. For Moscow, the objective is not necessarily to secure a Parliament openly declared as pro-Russian after the 2025 elections, but rather to install a majority capable of blocking reforms, taking control of key institutions, and promoting an ambivalent foreign policy, focused on renewing ties with Russia and opening up to China under the pretext of maintaining a so-called “geopolitical balance.”

On January 31, 2025, in Chişinău, the formation of the ‘Alternative’ Bloc was announced, a coalition bringing together several controversial political figures with past affiliations to oligarch-dominated or pro-Russian parties. The leaders of the new bloc are:

1. Ion Ceban, current mayor of Chişinău, former member of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, known for his previous positions in favor of Moldova’s integration into the Eurasian Union. In 2014, he organized a protest in Brussels against the signing of

<sup>39</sup> Doina Buruiiană, "BCS Proposes That Diaspora Citizens Should Not Be Able to Vote with Expired Passports," *Newsmaker.md*, April 2, 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/bcs-propune-ca-cetatenii-din-diaspora-sa-nu-poata-vota-cu-pasapoarte-expirate>.

<sup>40</sup> "Alexander Novak: Russia is prepared to explore cooperation options with Moldova across all spheres, including economics and energy," *The Government of the Russian Federation*, July 10, 2025, <http://government.ru/en/news/55606/>.



the Moldova–European Union Association Agreement and supported the unconstitutional referendum in Gagauzia on the region’s independence. In December 2022, Ceban launched his own party, the National Alternative Movement (MAN), with a declared pro-European agenda. Chişinău media have reported on his meetings with FSB agents,<sup>41</sup> while the U.S. Treasury stated in 2022 that the launch of MAN had benefited from Moscow’s support.<sup>42</sup>

2. Alexandr Stoianoglo, former Prosecutor General of the Republic of Moldova and candidate in the 2024 presidential elections, who received public backing from the Socialist Party and, indirectly, from the Shor network. Previously, he was a member of parliament for the Democratic Party, led by oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc, who dominated Moldova’s political scene between 2016 and 2019. Although he promoted a pro-European discourse during the 2024 presidential campaign, he supported the negative vote in the EU integration referendum.
3. Ion Chicu, former minister in governments controlled by Plahotniuc and prime minister during Igor Dodon’s presidency. In 2021, he founded the Party of Development and Consolidation of Moldova. Although he declares himself pro-European, he boycotted the EU integration referendum.
4. Mark Tkaciuk, former adviser to President Vladimir Voronin and key ideologue of the Communist Party between 2001 and 2008. He is known for promoting views that dispute Moldova’s Romanian identity and for openly anti-Western positions. Considered the most influential figure behind the scenes of the Communist government, Tkaciuk is also one of the authors of the controversial 2003 Kozak Memorandum, which provided for the federalization of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>43</sup>



*Fig. 5. “Alternative” Bloc leaders hold a press conference<sup>44</sup>*

<sup>41</sup>Cristina Mirca, “At ‘Coffee’ with FSB Political Technologists: Chişinău Mayor Ion Ceban Allegedly Advised by Moscow’s People,” *TVR Moldova*, November 1, 2023, <https://tvrmdova.md/article/9393645ab28e2806/foto-video-la-cafea-cu-polit-tehnologii-fsb-ului-primarul-ion-ceban-ar-fi-consiliat-de-oamenii-moscovei.html>.

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Individuals and Entities Connected to Ilan Shor’s Network of Corruption and Meddling in Moldova’s Elections,” October 26, 2022, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1049>

<sup>43</sup> Ilie Gulca, “The statements of Tkaciuk have provoked protests from the veterans of the Nistru War,” *TVR Moldova*, September 12, 2025, <https://tvrmdova.md/article/578cc0fea9cef879/declaratiile-lui-tkaciuk-au-provocat-proteste-ale-veteranilor-razboiului-de-pe-nistru.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Ion Ceban, “12 Directions of Concrete Actions for Moldova: The Vision of the Alternative Bloc,” March 21, 2025, <https://ionceban.md/12-directii-de-actiuni-concrete-pentru-moldova-viziunea-blocului-alternativa/>.

The alliance targets a segment of the electorate disappointed with PAS governance but still reluctant to support traditional pro-Russian parties. The bloc is built around Chişinău mayor Ion Ceban and his party—the National Alternative Movement (MAN)—which holds 15 of the first 30 positions on the electoral list.<sup>45</sup> When submitting the lists for the parliamentary elections, Ceban stated that his objective was to bring his colleagues into Parliament while continuing his mandate as mayor of Chişinău. In recent years, Ceban has turned the institutional platform of the mayor’s office into a constant stage for political attacks against PAS governance. However, the bloc suffered a reputational blow on July 9, 2025, when Romania’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Ion Ceban is banned from entering Romanian territory for reasons related to national security.<sup>46</sup> This decision could affect public perception and the electoral potential of the alliance.

Our Party, led by Renato Usatîi, represents another important political actor in the context of the 2025 parliamentary elections. A controversial figure on Moldova’s political scene, Usatîi has a past marked by business activities in the Russian Federation and connections with individuals from criminal circles.<sup>47</sup> In a 2013 interview, he described himself as a “Soviet man” and called Vladimir Putin his “hero”.<sup>48</sup> Paradoxically, in 2020, Usatîi was placed on an international wanted list by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in a case concerning the organization of a criminal group.<sup>49</sup> In recent years, the leader of Our Party has adopted a populist agenda, arguing that while some Moldovan parties are supported by the Russian Federation and others by the European Union or the United States, his formation relies exclusively on the support of citizens.<sup>50</sup> Avoiding a clear ideological or geopolitical positioning, Usatîi prefers to present himself as a lone politician fighting against everyone. The 13.79% result he obtained in the first round of the 2024 presidential elections confirms his ability to attract discontented voters. However, the precedent of 2021 raises questions: despite winning 16.9% in the 2020 presidential elections, his party secured only 4.10% in the 2021 parliamentary elections, failing to enter the legislature.<sup>51</sup> It remains to be seen whether, in 2025, Usatîi will manage to translate his personal electoral capital into success for the party and surpass the 5% threshold.

<sup>45</sup> "The 'Alternative' bloc launched its election campaign: 'We are building Europe here, at home, for us'," *Ziarul de Gardă*, September 17, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/blocul-alternativa-s-a-lansat-in-campania-electorala-construim-europa-aici-acasa-la-noi/>.

<sup>46</sup> "Romanian MFA explains why the mayor of Chişinău, Ion Ceban, was banned from entering Romania," *Adevărul*, July 9, 2025, <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/evenimente/mae-explica-de-ce-primarul-chisinaului-ion-ceban-2456592.html>.

<sup>47</sup> "What Is Renato Usatîi's Homeland?" *Ziarul de Gardă*, November 17, 2024, <https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/care-este-patria-lui-renato-usatii/>.

<sup>48</sup> Valentina Basiul, "Portrait of a... 'Soviet Man': Renato Usatîi," *Radio Free Europe Moldova*, January 28, 2016, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/27516625.html>.

<sup>49</sup> "Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs Has Put Renato Usatii on the International Wanted List," *TASS*, July 23, 2020, <https://tass.ru/proisshestviya/9038469>

<sup>50</sup> "Our Party Chairman Renato Usatîi: 'Moldova Needs Partners, Not Orders,'" March 10, 2025, <https://partidulnostru.md/post/predsedatel-nashej-partii-renato-usatyj-moldove-nuzhny-partnyory-a-ne-prikazy~67ceca99af417296d81c0510>

<sup>51</sup> "Portrait of Presidential Candidate Renato Usatîi," *Ştiri.md*, October 1, 2024, <https://stiri.md/article/politica/portretul-candidatului-renato-usatii-la-functia-de-presedinte-al-tarii/>.



*Fig. 6. Our Party submits to the CEC the set of documents and the list of candidates for the parliamentary elections on September 28.<sup>52</sup>*

### **Criminal Networks with Political Influence**

A central element of the 2025 parliamentary elections is the capacity of the network controlled by oligarch Ilan Shor to influence the electorate through funds originating from the Russian Federation—a tactic already documented during the 2024 elections. To counter these practices, the authorities have tightened legislation, introducing prison sentences of between 4 and 7 years for acts of electoral corruption.<sup>53</sup> On July 30, 2025, the Supreme Security Council reported sanctions against approximately 25,000 individuals involved in the electoral frauds of the previous year, with cumulative fines amounting to 15 million lei (around \$902,000).<sup>54</sup>

The network suffered a blow on August 5, 2025, with the conviction of Evghenia Guțul, the Bashkan (governor) of Gagauzia, who was sentenced to seven years in prison. She was found guilty of involvement in the illegal financing of the former Shor Party by channeling illicit funds from the Russian Federation into the Republic of Moldova between 2019 and 2022.<sup>55</sup> The ruling is not final and may be appealed to the Court of Appeal and subsequently to the

<sup>52</sup> Ion Ceban, "12 Directions of Concrete Actions for Moldova: The Vision of the Alternative Bloc," March 21, 2025,

<https://ionceban.md/12-directii-de-actiuni-concrete-pentru-moldova-viziunea-blocului-alternativa/>.

<sup>53</sup> Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, "Additional Legislative Measures to Combat Electoral Corruption, Voted in First Reading by Parliament," December 3, 2024, <https://multimedia.parlament.md/masuri-legislative-suplimentare-pentru-combaterea-coruptiei-electorale-votate-in-prima-lectura-de-parlament/>.

<sup>54</sup> "Electoral Corruption: Fines Worth Almost 15 Million Lei for People Who Sold Their Votes in the 2024 Elections," *Moldova1.md*, September 17, 2025, <https://moldova1.md/p/54064/corupere-electorala-amenzi-in-valoare-de-aproape-15-milioane-de-lei-pentru-persoanele-care-si-au-vandut-votul-la-alegerile-din-2024>.

<sup>55</sup> Măriuța Nistor, "VIDEO/ Taken into Custody from the Courtroom. How and Why Was the Head of Gagauzia Evghenia Guțul Condemned?," *Ziarul de Gardă*, August 5, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/video/video-luata-sub-straja-din-sala-de-justitie-cum-si-de-ce-a-fost-condamnata-bascan-evghenia-gutul/>.

Supreme Court of Justice, meaning that a definitive decision is expected only after the parliamentary elections of September 28.

The “Victory” Bloc—a coalition of parties controlled by Ilan Shor, created in Moscow in April 2024<sup>56</sup>—was banned from participating in the elections by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) on the grounds that it is the political successor of the Shor Party, declared unconstitutional in 2023.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Ilan Shor maintains a loyal electoral base, particularly in Gagauzia and in the municipality of Orhei, where he previously served as mayor. The votes of this segment of the electorate will be redirected to other political formations, depending on Shor’s instructions.

Among the parties that could benefit from the indirect support of the Shor network is the Greater Moldova Party, led by Victoria Furtună—a former prosecutor who accused law enforcement institutions of fabricating cases against judges disloyal to the PAS government.<sup>58</sup> According to journalistic investigations, Furtună allegedly received informal backing from the Shor network during the 2024 presidential elections, where she unexpectedly won 4.45% of the vote, despite her low visibility and the absence of a consolidated political structure. On August 14, Victoria Furtună and Irina Vlah—the leader of the Heart of Moldova Party, part of the “Patriotic” Bloc—were spotted returning together from Moscow, where they reportedly met with Sergey Kiriyenko, First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Administration.<sup>59</sup>

The “Greater Moldova” project is a revisionist initiative formulated by Russian ideologue Aleksandr Dugin as early as 2010. It envisions the detachment of territories from Romania and Ukraine in order to recreate the former Principality of Moldavia, in the form of a state that would become a strategic partner of Moscow.<sup>60</sup> In July 2025, during an event held in Romania, Victoria Furtună called for the unity of “all Moldovans, whether they live east or west of the Prut River.” Two months earlier, in May 2025, Furtună publicly demanded the “restoration of direct access to the Black Sea” for the Republic of Moldova, claiming that “the state has grounds to demand a revision of borders, especially since there is no ratified international treaty by Moldova recognizing the loss of Bugeac”.<sup>61</sup> These statements have raised concerns

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<sup>56</sup> “Fugitive Ilan Șor Gathered Leaders of Clone Parties in Moscow to Create a Common Political Bloc,” TV8, April 21, 2024, <https://tv8.md/2024/04/21/foto-fugarul-ilan-sor-si-a-adunat-liderii-partidelor-clona-la-moscova-pentru-a-crea-un-bloc-politic-comun/256042>.

<sup>57</sup> “The ‘Victory-Pobeda’ Bloc Was Not Registered by the CEC to Participate in the September 28 Elections,” *Moldova1.md*, July 19, 2025, <https://moldova1.md/p/53340/blocul-victorie-pobeda-nu-a-fost-inregistrat-de-cec-pentru-a-participa-la-alegerile-din-28-septembrie>.

<sup>58</sup> “Former Prosecutor Victoria Furtună Announces the Launch of a New Party. Expert: ‘An Initiative with Geopolitical Stakes,’” *Moldova1*, March 25, 2025, <https://moldova1.md/p/46118/fostul-procuror-victoria-furtuna-anunta-lansarea-unui-nou-partid-expert-o-initiativa-cu-miza-geopolitica>

<sup>59</sup> “Irina Vlah and Victoria Furtună, on the same plane: ‘Did you meet with Kirienko?’,” *Moldova1.md*, August 14, 2025, <https://moldova1.md/p/55123/video--irina-vlah-si-victoria-furtuna-in-acelasi-avion--v-ati-intalnit-cu-kirienko->.

<sup>60</sup> Aleksandr Dugin, “What Russia Wants from Moldova,” *Black Sea News*, October 5, 2010, <https://www.blackseanews.net/read/643>.

<sup>61</sup> “Asks for the ‘recovery’ of Bugeac: What are the risks of revanchist narratives launched by Victoria Furtună,” TV8, May 29, 2025, <https://tv8.md/2025/05/29/video-cere-recuperarea-bugeacului-care-sunt-riscurile-naratiunilor-revansarde-lansate-de-victoria-furtuna/282418>.



in Bucharest, and in September 2025, the Romanian press reported that the National Citizenship Authority was considering revoking Victoria Furtună's Romanian citizenship.<sup>62</sup>



Fig. 7. Victoria Furtună, leader of the "Greater Moldova" party, during the round table discussion "National Identity. Historical Truth. Millennial Values and Traditions."<sup>63</sup>

### Surprise Parties

Founded in 2011, the Democracy at Home Party could represent a surprise in these parliamentary elections, despite modest scores in opinion polls. The formation is led by Vasile Costiuc, a close associate of George Simion, the leader of Romania's AUR party, known for his sovereigntist positions. In the past, Costiuc was associated with oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, being involved, alongside other activists, in actions directed against the opposition during the period when Plahotniuc controlled Moldova's political scene. In addition, photographs have been made public showing Vasile Costiuc attending events in the Russian Federation organized by FSB General Alexandr Kondyakov.<sup>64</sup>

Recent analyses indicate a significant rise in Vasile Costiuc's popularity on TikTok, driven by the use of algorithm-manipulation strategies similar to those employed by Călin Georgescu—the surprise of the first round of Romania's 2024 presidential elections. Investigations have uncovered networks of TikTok accounts generating videos with millions of views, heavily promoting Costiuc and his party.<sup>65</sup> The activity is particularly concentrated in European states,

<sup>62</sup> "Euronews sources: Victoria Furtună targeted for revocation of Romanian Citizenship. Reaction from the Leader of the 'Greater Moldova' Party." *Euronews Romania*, September 18, 2025, <https://www.euronews.ro/articole/surse-euronews-victoria-furtuna-sefa-partidului-moldova-mare-vizata-de-retragerea>.

<sup>63</sup> "Furtună Victory Party will not participate in Parliamentary Elections: CEC rejected the registration of the list of candidates," *Newsmaker*, August 23, 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/partidul-victoriei-furtuna-nu-va-participa-la-alegerile-parlamentare-cec-a-respins-inregistrarea-listei-de-candidati>.

<sup>64</sup> "A Coordinated Network of 17 TikTok Accounts with Thousands of Followers Lifts Costiuc, Simion's Ally from Moldova, in the Algorithm," *Ziarul de Gardă*, April 30, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/o-retea-coordonata-de-17-conturi-pe-tik-tok-cu-mii-de-urmaritori-il-ridica-in-algorithm-pe-costiuc-aliatul-lui-simion-din-r-moldova/>.

<sup>65</sup> Mădălina Voinea and Sorin Ioniță, "Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior in Moldova's Elections," *Fact-Check Hub*, August 21, 2025,

aiming to attract votes from the pro-European diaspora—at the expense of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS). In Romania, the National Audiovisual Council identified approximately one thousand suspicious or fake accounts promoting the Democracy at Home Party.<sup>66</sup> In this context, a replication of Romania's 2020 electoral model cannot be ruled out, when AUR won 9% of the vote—mainly from the diaspora—despite polls giving it no chance of entering Parliament.



*Fig. 8. Vasile Costiuc thanks the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) in Romania for its support in the run-up to the September 28 elections.<sup>67</sup>*

#### 4. Polls and Electoral Scenarios

Opinion polls in the Republic of Moldova often provide an incomplete and contradictory picture of the electoral reality. They exclude the diaspora vote, which accounted for 19.35% of the total 1.7 million votes cast in the second round of the 2024 presidential elections, of which 82.92% were in favor of Maia Sandu.<sup>68</sup> Polls also do not account for voters from the Transnistrian region. For example, approximately 28,000 people from the left bank of the Dniester voted in the 2021 snap parliamentary elections, and 26,000 in the 2024 presidential elections.<sup>69</sup> For the September 2025 elections, the number of polling stations opened for these

<https://fact-hub.eu/ro/2025/08/21/comportament-inautentic-coordonat-in-alegerile-din-republica-moldova/>.

<sup>66</sup> "CNA Romania warns: fake accounts on TikTok promote the candidate Vasile Costiuc," *TVR Moldova*, September 7, 2025,

<https://tvrmdova.md/article/177f1109e20e5bc8/cna-romania-avertizeaza-conturi-false-pe-tiktok-promoveaza-candidatul-vasile-costiuc>.

<sup>67</sup> "Vasile Costiuc: 'Thank you AUR and George Simion for fraternity, solidarity, and trust,'" *Telegraph.md*, July 18, 2025, <https://telegraph.md/video-vasile-costiuc-multumim-aur-si-lui-george-simion-pentru-fraternitate-solidaritate-si-incredere/>.

<sup>68</sup> "2024 Presidential Elections in the Republic of Moldova," *Alegeri.md*, July 11, 2024, [https://alegeri.md/w/Alegeri\\_preziden%C8%9Biale\\_din\\_2024\\_%C3%AEn\\_Republica\\_Moldova](https://alegeri.md/w/Alegeri_preziden%C8%9Biale_din_2024_%C3%AEn_Republica_Moldova).

<sup>69</sup> Cristian Bolotnicov, "Who and why wants fewer or more polling stations for citizens from the left bank of the Dniester?," *Europa Liberă Moldova*, October 21, 2025, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/cine-si-de-ce-vrea-mai-putine-sau-mai-multe-sectii-de-votare-pentru-cetatenii-din-stanga-nistrului-/33507440.html>.

citizens was reduced from 30 (in 2024) to 12, each with a cap of 3,000 ballots.<sup>70</sup> Another limitation is the difficulty of capturing the behavior of voters vulnerable to electoral corruption, who either do not honestly express their preference or manipulate their responses in polls, but become active on election day. In addition, the high share of undecided respondents, between 25% and 30%, introduces a heightened level of uncertainty, with the potential to significantly alter the final outcome.

Access to the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is subject to electoral thresholds of 5% for parties, 7% for electoral blocs, and 2% for independents. During the pre-election period from April 5 to July 13, 2025, the average of seven opinion polls shows the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) as the leading political force, with 39.3% of the decided voters' intentions. The Patriotic Bloc ranks second with 23.8%, solidifying its status as the main opposition force. The Victory Bloc (subsequently disqualified from the race) was polling at 11.4%, indicating a potential redistribution of its votes to ideologically aligned parties. The Alternative Bloc stands at 10.8%, while Our Party, led by Renato Usatîi, is the last formation polling above the electoral threshold, with 6.5%.<sup>71</sup> For comparison, during the 2021 snap parliamentary elections (based on the average of nine polls), PAS was polling at 42.6%, the "Communists and Socialists" Bloc at 33.6%, the Shor Party at 6.8%, and Our Party at 5.3%.

During the electoral campaign, the average of three opinion polls reveals a high level of indecision among likely voters—25.5%. Among those who indicated a clear voting preference, PAS ranks first with 38.5%, followed by the 'Patriotic' Bloc with 28.3%, Our Party with 8.3%, and the "Alternative" Bloc with 8.2%. Among the parties closest to the electoral threshold are the Democracy at Home Party with 2.53% and the Greater Moldova Party with 2.4%.<sup>72 73 74</sup>

To estimate the distribution of seats in the future Parliament based on decided voters, the data presented above were processed using the d'Hondt method — a proportional algorithm that divides the valid votes by a series of natural numbers, allocating seats according to the highest resulting values. According to this calculation, the seat distribution would be as follows: PAS — 47 seats, the "Patriotic" Bloc — 34 seats, the "Alternative" Bloc and Our Party — 10 seats each. This estimate closely aligns with the average of pre-election polls, which indicated: 43 seats for PAS, 25 for the "Patriotic" Bloc, 13 for the "Victory" Bloc, 12 for the "Alternative" Bloc, and 8 for Our Party.

The final configuration of the future Parliament will largely depend on voter turnout within the diaspora and the number of parties that manage to surpass the electoral threshold. For instance, 150,000 diaspora votes for PAS would translate into approximately 8–10 seats,

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<sup>70</sup> "12 Polling Stations Will Be Opened for the Transnistrian Region in the Parliamentary Elections on September 28," *Government of the Republic of Moldova*, August 26, 2025, <https://gov.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa-bpr/12-sectii-de-votare-vor-fi-deschise-pentru-regiunea-transnistreana-la>.

<sup>71</sup> "Opinion polls," *Alegeri.md*, n.d., accessed September 22, 2025, <https://alegeri.md/w/Alegerile-parlamentare-din-2025-%C3%AEn-Republica-Moldova#Sondaje-de-opinie>

<sup>72</sup> Mihai Bologan, "Electoral Barometer, Wave 2, 09.08.2025," video, *Facebook*, September 8, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/bologan/videos/764790823137897>.

<sup>73</sup> "IRI Poll for Washington: PAS Would Obtain the Majority in the New Parliament," *Deschide.md*, September 12, 2025, <https://www.deschide.md/articole/surse-sondaj-iri-pentru-washington-pas-ar-obtine-majoritatea-in-noul-parlament>.

<sup>74</sup> "Socio-political Survey," *WatchDog.MD*, September 2025, <https://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Sondaj-socio-politic-Septembrie-2025.pdf>.

assuming a total voter turnout of 1.5 million. If at least four parties enter Parliament, PAS's chances of securing a parliamentary majority decrease significantly — and in an unfavorable scenario, the party could even find itself in opposition. On the other hand, if only three political forces manage to enter Parliament — and one of the formations, such as Our Party or the 'Alternative' Bloc, fails to pass the threshold — PAS could benefit from the redistribution of votes and would have a real chance of obtaining a new parliamentary majority.

PAS leader Igor Grosu stated that the party is willing to form coalitions only with parties that unequivocally support European integration, explicitly ruling out any cooperation with the “Patriotic” Bloc, the “Alternative” Bloc, or Our Party.<sup>75</sup> However, if PAS fails to secure a parliamentary majority on its own, cooperation with Our Party appears more plausible than with the “Alternative” Bloc, which PAS leaders have consistently accused of promoting the interests of the Russian Federation. Renato Usatîi has adopted a more pragmatic discourse, has suggested openness to supporting a technocratic government, and maintains a tense relationship with Igor Dodon — factors that reduce the likelihood of an alliance between Our Party, the “Patriotic” Bloc, and the “Alternative” Bloc. Nevertheless, Usatîi remains an unpredictable actor, and the volatility of the political landscape does not entirely rule out the possibility of a coalition among these forces.

In another scenario, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) may attempt to form a parliamentary majority by garnering the support of individual MPs from parties that have entered Parliament and who personally share the goal of Moldova's accession to the European Union. In such a case, the new government could be composed predominantly of politically unaffiliated individuals, with a clear mandate to manage accession negotiations — resulting in a more limited political influence of PAS over the executive. It is worth noting that a civic initiative called “Europe 28” has been launched in Chişinău, bringing together entrepreneurs, economists, and business community representatives. The platform supports economic reforms and rapid EU integration, promoting the same goal outlined in PAS's electoral program: signing the Accession Treaty by 2028.<sup>76</sup> Members of this platform could play a significant role after the September parliamentary elections, potentially as part of a technocratic government or one with a more depoliticized profile.

## 5. RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE AND DESTABILIZATION RISKS

### Electoral Corruption

Similar to the 2024 presidential election and referendum, Moscow is expected to continue its strategy of influencing the electoral process through voter bribery and the dissemination of disinformation via social media networks.<sup>77</sup> In the context of the current parliamentary

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<sup>75</sup> “Renato Usatîi: The next government cannot be formed without our party!,” *Our Party*, September 5, 2025, <https://partidulnostru.md/post/renato-usatii-urmatorul-guvern-nu-poate-fi-format-fara-partidul-nostru~68bade5d47af1d5346058185>.

<sup>76</sup> “Manifesto Europe 2028: 12 steps for a healthy economy,” *Europa 2028*, September 2025, <https://www.europa2028.eu/manifest>

<sup>77</sup> Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova, Assessment of the Russian Federation's Involvement in Moldova's Electoral Processes in 2024–2025, March 5, 2024, <https://sis.md/sites/default/files/comunicate/fisiere/Scenarii%20de%20influen%C8%9B%C4%83%202024-2025.pdf>



elections, particular attention is being paid to the diaspora, where there is a risk of direct attempts to disrupt the voting process. Among the anticipated tactics are false bomb threats at polling stations in European countries — a phenomenon already recorded in 2024, when 14 polling stations were targeted.<sup>78</sup> Another major risk involves the organized transportation of voters residing in the Russian Federation to Belarus, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, or even directly to Moldova, with the aim of mobilizing the pro-Russian electorate and influencing the outcome of the election.

The authorities are making efforts to curb the activity of voter corruption networks. On August 6, 2025, the Head of the General Police Inspectorate, Viorel Cernăuțeanu, announced the uncovering of a new electoral corruption scheme coordinated from the Russian Federation and operated through the Taito application — an encrypted messaging platform used to mobilize activists affiliated with the Shor group. According to him, tens of thousands of individuals have installed the app, which does not require a phone number for registration, making it more difficult to identify users and track transactions. He specified that the activists are remunerated through a complex mechanism: the funds are initially transferred in Russian rubles via Promsvyazbank, then converted into cryptocurrencies, subsequently into foreign currency, and finally into Moldovan lei.<sup>79</sup>

The authorities intensified their actions especially in September, when, in just the first week, officers from the National Anticorruption Center (CNA) conducted over 100 searches related to the illegal financing of political parties. Prosecutors presented audio recordings revealing the organization of a campaign to reward electoral agitators, who were paid 1,000 lei per month (approximately \$60), with promises of higher amounts in August and September. Authorities seized significant amounts of cash in various currencies, along with phones, laptops, banking documents, and MIR cards.<sup>80</sup> On September 8, the CNA carried out another 60 searches nationwide and detained 15 individuals involved in voter recruitment and offering money or goods in exchange for political support.<sup>81</sup> On September 16, over 20 million lei in various currencies (approximately \$1.2 million) were seized by CNA officers.<sup>82</sup> Some of the searches targeted members of the Heart of Moldova party, part of the “Patriotic” Bloc, and on

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<sup>78</sup> “President Maia Sandu’s Speech in the European Parliament,” Presidency of the Republic of Moldova, September 9, 2025, <https://presedinte.md/presa/discursul-presedintei-maia-sandu-in-parlamentul-european>

<sup>79</sup> “IGP Chief Viorel Cernăuțeanu: “The TAITO application is used by members of the Shor criminal organization for illegal financing and electoral corruption,” Moldpres, September 12, 2025, <https://shorturl.at/ReWQt>

<sup>80</sup> “Law enforcement officers conduct large-scale searches in Southern Moldova in a case of electoral corruption, four people detained,” *Infotag.md*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.infotag.md/incidents-ro/326462/>.

<sup>81</sup> “CNA announces 60 national searches and 15 people arrested in a case of illegal financing of political parties, electoral corruption, and money laundering,” *National Anticorruption Center*, September 8, 2025, <https://cna.md/ro/comunicate-de-presa/cna-anunta-60-de-perchezitii-la-nivel-national-si-15-persoane-retinute-intr-un>.

<sup>82</sup> Eliza Mihalache, “CNA raids in the capital: Over 20 million lei seized in the illegal financing of parties case,” *Moldova1.md*, September 16, 2025, <https://moldova1.md/p/57363/perchezitii-cna-in-capitala-pest-20-de-milioane-de-lei-ridicati-in-dosarul-finantarii-ilegale-a-partidelor>.

September 17, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) decided to notify the Ministry of Justice regarding restrictions on the party's activities.<sup>83</sup>



*Fig. 9. Images published by the National Anti-Corruption Center (CNA) during searches related to the illegal financing of political parties.<sup>84</sup>*

An internal report from the Shor network, which surfaced publicly in September, indicates that approximately 70% of the funds sent from the Russian Federation for the illegal financing of political parties in the Republic of Moldova have vanished without a trace. As a result of these losses, Ilan Shor was reportedly compelled by the FSB, at the direct request of the Kremlin, to hire former police officers and security officials from Moldova to investigate the embezzlements. The document reveals that although the Kremlin allocates \$300 for each activist, they actually receive only \$45–50. In 2023 alone, leaders of the Shor group are believed to have misappropriated around \$10 million from the funds allocated by Moscow for political and electoral activities. The report identifies Marina Tauber — until recently the group's main representative in Moldova — as the primary beneficiary of these embezzled funds. Additionally, another 61 regional leaders are said to have appropriated between 20% and 40% of the amounts intended for local activists.<sup>85</sup>

### Changes in the Presidential Administration of the Kremlin

Significant changes have occurred in the structure of the Presidential Administration in Moscow, with direct implications for the Republic of Moldova. On August 29, 2025, Vladimir Putin dissolved two departments under the authority of Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration: the Department for Interregional and Cultural Relations with

<sup>83</sup> Sabrina Colbasnicov, "CEC seeks to limit the activity of the 'Inima Moldovei' Party; Vlah: 'Politically motivated decision'," *TV8.md*, September 17, 2025, <https://tv8.md/2025/09/17/cec-cere-limitarea-activitatii-partidului-inima-moldovei-vlah-decizie-motivata-politic/288949>.

<sup>84</sup> Eliza Mihalache, "CNA raids in the capital: Over 20 million lei seized in the illegal financing of parties case," *Moldova1.md*, September 16, 2025, <https://moldova1.md/p/57363/perchezitii-cna-in-capitala-pest-20-de-milioane-de-lei-ridicati-in-dosarul-finantarii-ilegale-a-partidelor>.

<sup>85</sup> Tudor Ioniță, "Report to the FSB: Marina Tauber and other leaders of the 'Shor' group stole millions of dollars given by Moscow for party activists," *Deschide.md*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.deschide.md/articole/raport-catre-fsb-marina-tauber-si-alti-lideri-din-gruparea-sor-au-furat-milioane-de-dolari-dati-de-moscova-pentru-activistii-partidului/>.

Foreign Countries and the Department for Cross-Border Cooperation.<sup>86</sup> The latter was led by Igor Maslov, a colonel in the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), who has been identified in multiple investigations as the coordinator of the “Moldova department” within the Presidential Administration, responsible for monitoring the political landscape and coordinating pro-Russian forces in Moldova.<sup>87</sup> These two departments have been replaced by a new entity: the Department for Strategic Partnership and Cooperation, now reporting directly to Sergey Kiriyenko, First Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration and the Kremlin’s key figure in charge of domestic political operations.<sup>88</sup>

For over two decades, Dmitry Kozak was a proponent of a “soft” influence strategy in the Republic of Moldova, focused on political and diplomatic means. He authored the 2003 federalization memorandum, which was ultimately rejected at the last minute by Vladimir Voronin, and supported pro-Russian leaders such as Igor Dodon and Irina Vlah. In contrast to Kozak, Sergey Kiriyenko is perceived as a hardline strategist, focused on rapid, uncompromising results. Regarded as one of Vladimir Putin’s most influential advisors and nicknamed the “architect of modern Russian propaganda,” Kiriyenko assumed in 2022 the coordination of Kremlin policies in Donbas and the Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine.<sup>89</sup> Since 2023, Kiriyenko has intensified his focus on the Republic of Moldova and is considered the main backer of the Shor network and of aggressive methods aimed at destabilizing the political landscape in Chișinău.<sup>90</sup> For Sergey Kiriyenko, Moldova’s parliamentary elections represent an opportunity to secure swift geopolitical gains in the region.

In the event that the formation of a pro-Moscow parliamentary majority fails, destabilization scenarios become increasingly likely — including challenges to the legitimacy of the elections. The narrative of alleged electoral fraud is already present in both the public discourse in Chișinău and in Moscow. Recently, the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Sergey Shoigu, accused the PAS government of attempting to manipulate the diaspora vote.<sup>91</sup> In this context, it is worth recalling the October 2024 statement by the Director of the Intelligence and Security Service (SIS), Alexandru Musteață, who reported that over 300 Moldovan youths had been trained in camps in Russia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to incite unrest during the presidential elections and the constitutional referendum on European integration. According to the authorities, these individuals were trained in the use of drones and the fabrication of improvised explosive devices, under the supervision of foreign nationals linked to private paramilitary groups, including “Wagner”.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Andrey Prah, “The Kremlin will create a new department for interaction with the near abroad,” *Kommersant.ru*, August 29, 2025, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8005368>.

<sup>87</sup> Vladimir Thorik, “President of Russian Intelligence,” *Rise.md*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.rise.md/articol/presedintele-inteligentei-ruse/>.

<sup>88</sup> “Sergey Kiriyenko can become the curator of the new Presidential Administration department,” *Kommersant.ru*, August 29, 2025, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8005372>.

<sup>89</sup> “Vice-king of Donbas,” *Meduza.io*, June 8, 2022, <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/06/08/vitse-korol-donbassa>.

<sup>90</sup> Discussions with Chișinău officials during the New Strategy Center experts’ fact-finding visit to Moldova, November 18–20, 2024

<sup>91</sup> Olga Gorchak, “Shoigu: Moldova plans to falsify the diaspora's vote. Reaction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova,” *Newsmaker.md*, 11 august 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/ru/shoigu-moldova-planiruet-falsificzirovat-golosovanie-diaspory-reakcziya-mid-rm>.

<sup>92</sup> Ecaterina Arvintii, “Over 300 young people from the Republic of Moldova, trained to cause chaos at the elections: 88 searches across the country and 1.6 million lei confiscated,” *Radio Moldova*, October

## Destabilization Actions in the Energy Sector

Although Chişinău is no longer dependent on gas supplied by Gazprom and, since January 2025, has been securing its electricity through European imports, the risk of a new energy crisis remains. The Republic of Moldova has four natural gas entry points: the Iaşi–Chişinău pipeline (from Romania), the Alexeevka point (from Ukraine), the Grebenichi point (from Ukraine, via the Transnistrian region), and the Orlovka point (on the Moldova–Ukraine border, part of the Trans-Balkan corridor). During the night of August 5 to 6, 2025, the distribution station at Orlovka was damaged following an attack by Russian forces. The incident did not cause energy destabilization in the Republic of Moldova, including Transnistria, as the entire gas supply is currently imported through the Iaşi–Chişinău pipeline.<sup>93</sup>



Fig. 10. Iaşi-Chişinău pipeline (in red)<sup>94</sup>

Nonetheless, during the cold season, the capacity of the Iaşi–Chişinău gas pipeline — approximately 5 million cubic meters per day — is insufficient to simultaneously cover consumption on both banks of the Dniester, except under conditions of restrictions imposed on the industrial sector. During the winter of 2024/2025, average daily gas consumption in the territory controlled by the authorities in Chişinău reached 4.75 million cubic meters, leaving limited flexibility to also meet the needs of the Transnistrian region. There, average daily winter

17, 2024,  
<https://radiomoldova.md/p/41551/peste-300-de-tineri-din-r-moldova-instruiti-sa-provoace-haos-la-alegeri-88-de-perchezitii-in-toata-tara-si-1-6-milioane-de-lei-confiscati>.

<sup>93</sup> Gabriela Munteanu, "Drone attack on the 'Orlovka' gas station in Ukraine" *Ziarul de Gardă*, August 6, 2025, <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/atac-cu-drone-asupra-statiei-de-gaze-orlovka-din-ucraina-ministerul-energiei-declara-ca-r-moldova-nu-a-fost-afectata-expert-rusia-va-incerca-sa-creeze-din-nou-probleme-e/>.

<sup>94</sup> "Moldovagaz has opened the tap to the Transnistrian region," *Europa Liberă Moldova*, February 1, 2025, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/moldovagaz-a-deschis-robinetul-catre-regiunea-transnistreana-/33299506.html>



consumption is estimated at around 2.65 million cubic meters, primarily to cover humanitarian needs.<sup>95</sup> In this context, since February 2025, the gas supply to the Transnistrian region has, at times, been ensured via the Orlovka entry point. Should gas imports through Orlovka become impossible, the only technically viable alternatives would be the routes via the Alexeevka and Grebenichi points — both contingent on the Ukrainian authorities' approval for transit of gas intended for the Transnistrian region. Given this, a potential escalation of Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure — especially near these entry points — could indicate a deliberate Kremlin strategy to destabilize Moldova during the winter by triggering an energy, economic, and humanitarian crisis. In such a scenario, Chișinău may be forced to temporarily shut down industrial operations and restrict household consumption to ensure minimal humanitarian gas deliveries to Transnistria.

A key vulnerability for Moldova's energy security in the coming months lies in its interconnectivity with Romania's electricity transmission network, which currently depends on a single 400 kV line: Isaccea–Vulcănești–Cuciurgan. This line passes through Ukrainian territory — near the area recently bombed by Russia at Orlovka — and continues through Transnistria, reaching the Cuciurgan power plant, from where electricity is redirected to Chișinău. This route gives Moscow, via the Tiraspol regime, a potential pressure lever and raises the risk of sabotage that could disrupt Moldova's electricity supply from Romania. To eliminate this vulnerability, Chișinău is constructing a new 400 kV line — Vulcănești–Chișinău — that will directly interconnect the Romanian and Moldovan power grids, bypassing Transnistria. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of 2025.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ana-Maria Dolghii "How much gas was bought for Transnistria from the European grant? Energocom's clarifications," *Newsmaker.md*, February 11, 2025, <https://newsmaker.md/ro/cat-gaz-a-fost-cumparat-pentru-transnistria-din-grantul-european-precizarile-energocom>.

<sup>96</sup> "The Vulcănești-Chișinău Energy Independence Line Project Records Progress," Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Moldova, August 12, 2025, <https://energie.gov.md/ro/content/proiectul-linii-independentei-energetice-vulcanesti-chisinau-inregistreaza-un-avans>



Fig. 11. The new 400 kV Vulcănești-Chișinău power line (in green)<sup>97</sup>

## Regional Security Risks

The formation of a parliamentary coalition dominated by pro-Russian and anti-reformist parties following the September 2025 elections could pave the way for the weakening of key institutions that have played a central role in countering hostile influence from the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova. A major concern is the potential transfer of control over the Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) from the Presidency to Parliament. This risk is heightened by multiple documented cases in recent years involving the recruitment of public officials by Russian intelligence services. In September 2024, former Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier General Igor Gorgan, was indicted for espionage on behalf of Moscow, having been recruited by Russian military intelligence (GRU).<sup>98</sup> In July 2024, the head of the Legal Department of Parliament was caught in the act of transmitting classified information to an employee of the Russian Embassy in Chișinău. In the same case, a Border Police officer was arrested for conspiracy against the Republic of Moldova.<sup>99</sup> On September 8, 2025, Alexandru Bălan, former Deputy Director of the Intelligence and Security Service (2016–2019), was

<sup>97</sup> "Moldovagaz has opened the tap to the Transnistrian region," *Europa Liberă Moldova*, February 1, 2025, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/moldovagaz-a-deschis-robinetul-catre-regiunea-transnistreana-/33299506.html>

<sup>98</sup> Iurie Rotari, "Prosecutors charged General Gorgan in the case of espionage in favor of Russia," *Europa Liberă Moldova*, September 19, 2024, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/procurorii-l-au-pus-sub-invinuire-pe-generalul-gorgan-in-dosarul-privind-spionajul-in-favoarea-rusiei/33126113.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Cristian Bolotnicov and Denis Dermenji, "SIS and PCCOCS Conducted Searches in Parliament," *Radio Free Europe Moldova*, July 31, 2024, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/sis-si-pccocs-au-descins-cu-perchezitii-in-parlament/33057505.html>

detained by Romanian authorities on charges of disclosing Romanian state secrets to KGB officers from Belarus.<sup>100</sup> In the event of a government aligned with Moscow's interests, the appointment of individuals recruited by Russian intelligence services to strategic institutions could result in critical breaches in Moldova's national security architecture.

Russia may attempt a covert rotation of its military contingent in Transnistria by sending "civilians" through Chişinău International Airport, should the Moldovan government adopt a more accommodating stance toward Moscow. Although the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Transnistria (OGRF) consists of approximately 1,500 troops and is equipped with outdated hardware, it continues to pose a latent threat to Ukraine's Black Sea coast.<sup>101</sup>

Russia could also infiltrate individuals with military training to orchestrate subversive actions in Gagauzia, where a pro-Kremlin sentiment is already present. An escalation of tensions in Gagauzia could have direct implications for the Budjak region in southern Ukraine, located between the Danube River and the Dniester — a strategic area encompassing all of Ukraine's Danube ports. Characterized by significant ethnic diversity, the Budjak region includes a Gagauz community of approximately 25,000 people.<sup>102</sup> In 2015, following the annexation of Crimea, Russia attempted to destabilize Budjak by promoting the idea of a so-called "Budjak People's Republic," as part of the broader 'Novorossiia' scenario. The plan aimed to isolate Ukraine from the Black Sea and the Danube, severely damaging its economy and cutting off access to maritime trade routes".<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Cristian Otopeanu, "Former Deputy Director of the Moldovan Intelligence Service, Alexandru Balan, Detained by DIICOT after Being Accused of Spying on Romania for Belarus," *Libertatea.ro*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/alexandru-balan-sis-spion-secrete-stat-romania-belarus-audiat-diicot-5442465>.

<sup>101</sup> "Map of the Security Zone." *Zona de Securitate*, n.d, accessed May 7, 2025. <https://zonadesecuritate.md/securitate/harta-zs-zona-de-securitate/>.

<sup>102</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Bessarabia's 'ethnographic Harlequin' in a regional perspective," *Euromaidanpress.com*, June 2, 2020, <https://euromaidanpress.com/2020/06/02/bessarabias-ethnographic-harlequin-in-a-regional-perspective/>.

<sup>103</sup> John R. Haines, "A Quarrel In A Far-Away Country: The Rise Of A Budzhak People's Republic?," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, April 8, 2015, [https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/04/a-quarrel-in-a-far-away-country-the-rise-of-a-budzhak-peoples-republic/#\\_ftn4](https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/04/a-quarrel-in-a-far-away-country-the-rise-of-a-budzhak-peoples-republic/#_ftn4).

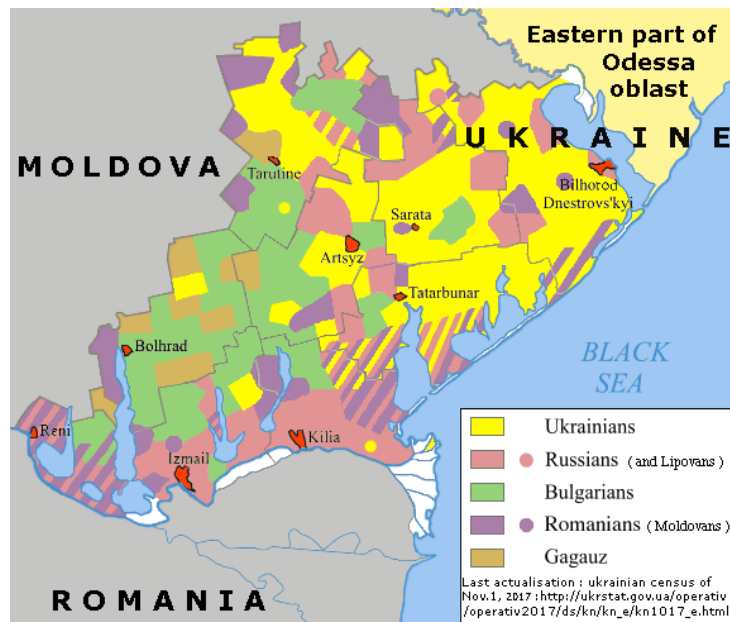


Fig. 16. Ethnic composition of the Ukrainian Budjak Region

Another scenario that should not be overlooked concerns Moldova's narrow access to the Danube River — just 420 meters wide — via the Giurgiulești port, located in close proximity to Ukraine's Reni port. In the event of a pro-Russian government coming to power in Chișinău, Russian special forces could infiltrate the area to block freedom of navigation on the river, which flows from Germany to the Black Sea. Such a scenario would have serious implications for the security of both Romania and Ukraine. The Danube ports have played a vital role in facilitating Ukrainian grain exports since Russia's 2022 invasion, and any disruption to navigation would directly impact logistical chains and future reconstruction efforts in southern Ukraine. The August 28, 2025 attack — when Russia used a naval drone for the first time against a Ukrainian vessel on the Chilia branch — marks a significant escalation in naval warfare. It demonstrates that Russia possesses autonomous systems and sufficient command-and-control capabilities to threaten navigation along the Danube.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Adrian Cochino and Victor Cozmei, "Unprecedented Russian Attack in the Danube Delta, on the border with Romania. VIDEO with the first action of this kind successfully carried out by Moscow since the beginning of the war," *HotNews.ro*, August 29, 2025, <https://hotnews.ro/atac-fara-precedent-al-rusiei-in-delta-dunarii-la-granita-cu-romania-video-cu-prima-actiune-de-acest-gen-reusita-de-moscova-de-la-inceputul-razboiului-2054355>.



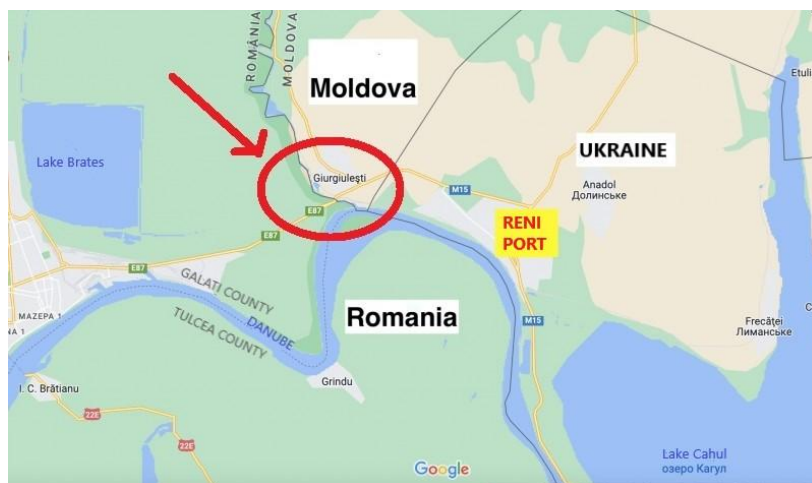


Fig. 22. Port of Giurgiulești<sup>105</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The parliamentary elections of September 28, 2025, represent a decisive moment for the strategic direction of the Republic of Moldova, particularly regarding its European integration path. For the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), backed by pro-European President Maia Sandu, the main challenge lies not only in securing a favorable electoral outcome but in the ability to form a stable parliamentary majority capable of supporting a reform agenda that is essential for advancing the EU accession process.

The geopolitical stakes are high, and all scenarios remain on the table: from the formation of a genuine pro-European majority, to a fragile coalition vulnerable to the influence of pro-Kremlin actors, or even the emergence of a pro-Russian parliamentary majority. In this context, the diaspora is expected to play a critical role — as it did during the 2024 presidential elections and constitutional referendum — with the capacity to significantly influence the balance of power. Georgia's experience serves as a relevant precedent, illustrating the risk that pro-European President Maia Sandu could become politically isolated, facing a hostile government capable of undermining the European integration process through controversial initiatives. Moreover, the rhetoric of pro-Kremlin parties — invoking potential electoral fraud — fuels growing concerns about possible destabilization efforts in the post-election period.

The parliamentary election in the Republic of Moldova is being closely watched in Kyiv, as a potential victory by pro-Russian forces would mean the loss of a key regional partner for Ukraine. This concern is all the more relevant at a time when Moldova's strategic importance is gaining increasing weight in the Kremlin's geopolitical calculations.

The outcome of the parliamentary elections will directly impact bilateral relations with Romania, a member of both the European Union and NATO, with which the Republic of Moldova shares deep historical, political, economic, and cultural ties. In recent years, Romania has played a key role in supporting Moldova's internal stability and European path. In this context, any geopolitical reorientation — particularly through the entry into Parliament of parties with a revisionist agenda — would have direct consequences on the strategic relationship between the two countries.

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.ziarulprofit.ro/romania-vrea-sa-cumpere-portul-giurgiulesti-din-republica-moldova/>

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